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REPORT ON ONGOING WORK BEING DONE ON BENCHMARKS AND INDICATORS

Note by the secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. By decision 10/9, adopted at its tenth session, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (INCD), taking note of the report contained in document A/AC.241/INF.4 on ongoing work being done on benchmarks and indicators for measuring progress in the implementation of the Convention, requested the interim secretariat:

(a) To continue its work on benchmarks and indicators begun in response to decisions 8/8 and 9/12 and solicit written submissions from interested members of the Committee and competent organizations, to be received by 17 March 1997;

(b) To continue the informal open-ended consultative process established pursuant to decision 9/12;

(c) To further expand the work to encompass the Asian, Latin American and Caribbean regions;

(d) To report to the Conference of the Parties at its first session on the work undertaken, with particular reference to measurement indicators.

2. The section below constitutes the report requested in subparagraph (d).

II. CONTRIBUTIONS FROM INCD MEMBERS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

3. The secretariat received written contributions from 10 Committee members and 5 international organizations. The comments and suggestions concerned indicators relating to Convention implementation, benchmarks and environmental impact indicators. There may be contradictions and overlaps, as is often the case when a collection of viewpoints is summarized. The views expressed may be summarized as follows:

A. Indicators to measure the implementation of the Convention

(a) Annex 1 to document A/AC.241/INF.4, submitted at the tenth session, affords a good base for indicators of the implementation of the Convention. Additional work should be done to clarify the evaluation parameters and the definition of a standard report on indicators so as to ensure that the reporting system is as simple and direct as possible. The result might be used by the Committee on Science and Technology to draw up directives for the Parties and regional and subregional organizations in the preparation of their reports on the implementation of the Convention;

(b) The matrix of implementation indicators put forward at the tenth session of INCD should be made widely available, and should include instructions for use. It should be tested in countries that are well advanced in the formulation of their National Action Plans (NAPs) in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean;

(c) Machinery will be set up to revise the suggested matrix as the need arises, including indicators on the media (audio-visual, written etc.) and on consciousness-raising among the local population;

(d) A standard minimum set of indicators applicable worldwide needs to be established, along with indicators suited to each region in order to take account of specific regional features;

(e) Indicators and evaluation parameters need to be weighted for the quantitative evaluation of the data. Implementation in various conditions will then be evaluated by the sum of the number of points obtained;

(f) There is a clear difference between the notions of benchmarks and indicators;

(g) Benchmarks allow for a basic level of surveillance in that they are defined, agreed standards that may change over time, or afford a reference point for comparing the values of indicators at a given moment or at other periods over time. Benchmarks for implementation indicators, such as average performance in terms of indicator value in a region or subregion, could be established. On the other hand, the lack of data could be a problem when establishing benchmarks for impact indicators.

B. Impact indicators

(a) It is important to emphasize that indicators describing the severity and extent of desertification and its socio-economic consequences could be of use in developing implementation indicators. Indicators of rehabilitation follow-up and the effects of countermeasures, together with socio-economic indicators, should therefore be developed further, while continuing to work on indicators of the state of the area under consideration and degradation by reference to previous findings or protected areas.

(b) The evaluation and application of impact indicators in the countries concerned is lagging well behind the many other undertakings relating to the conceptual, theoretical and scientific development of indicators embarked upon since 1992. Rare are the proposed indicators that have been tested, calculated and applied. The problem is related to the complexity of the work, the skills available and the cost. These constraints serve to deter many countries, including developed ones.

(c) A ground-up approach, drawing on local knowledge which may yield basic indicators that are understood and applied by local communities, should be developed. The indicators thus arrived at will be validated and integrated at the national or regional scale at which decisions are taken.

(d) Priority in relation to impact indicators should crystallize around the quantitative analysis of local experience in this area, the cost and effectiveness of bilateral and multilateral projects, the relationships between local- and national-level impact indicators, and methodological and operational aspects.

(e) The recommendations concerning future work on impact indicators in paragraphs 9, 10 and 11 of note A/AC.241/INF.4 are important. The Committee on Science and Technology could, at the request of the Conference of the Parties, take on this task, assisted by an ad hoc group like that convened by the secretariat in November 1996 and July 1997. It could take stock of the ongoing work on impact indicators, identify gaps in knowledge for priority undertakings and look for partners to carry out a work plan on desertification indicators. Its responsibilities would be:

(i) To take stock of ongoing work on indicators;

(ii) To look for partners to carry out a work plan;

(iii) To identify lead agencies in the light of the tasks to be assigned, with due regard for topics, the scale being considered, and the resources and skills of each institution; and

(iv) To follow up on and evaluate the results.

III. COMMENTS BY ORGANIZATIONS ON THE ONGOING WORK ON INDICATORS

4. A number of bodies are studying environmental impact indicators, including those describing the extent and degree of desertification and its

socio-economic consequences that may be of use in developing indicators for the implementation of the Convention. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Office to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNSO) offered the following comments:

(a) UNEP will complete the second edition of a desertification atlas, probably in September 1997. The atlas contains indicators on desertification at the local and national level. It identifies useful approaches to the struggle against desertification. It refers to the links between poverty, migration and security, and between desertification, loss of biodiversity, global warming and drinking-water resources.

(b) UNSO has undertaken a study of the population in dry areas, notably in Africa. Similar studies are planned for the Asian and Latin American regions. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNSO, in collaboration with UNEP and other institutions, are working on the formulation and design of a desertification evaluation and monitoring initiative taking due account of the socio-economic dimensions of desertification.

5. Pursuant to decision 10/9, adopted at the tenth session of INCD, the secretariat has continued the informal open-ended consultative process and brought together a group of participants in Ottawa, Canada, from 15 to 17 July 1997 with support from the Canadian, International Development Research Centre. The group's mandate was to devote particular attention to the honing of implementation indicators and the development of a method of establishing impact indicators.

6. The report of this group will appear under the symbol ICCD/COP(1)/CST/3/Add.1.